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MULTIMEDIA MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/201,118 filed May 2, 2001, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference thereto.

**STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED
RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT**

Not Applicable.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. *Field of the Invention*

The present invention relates to the marketing and distribution of multimedia material, including digitally generated film, video, graphics and audio, and analogues traditional media converted into digital movie and television programs, and associated marketing materials for distribution over a computer network to exhibitors and broadcasters.

2. *Description of Related Art Including Information Disclosed under 37 CFR 1.97 and 37 CFR 1.98*

The explosive growth of computer networks, like the Internet, has provided a convenient way for computer users to obtain from remote sites information in the form of text, graphics and audio, as well as video. A computer connected to the Internet or other computer network can also be utilized to interact in real-time with other computers connected to the computer network.

The film and television industries have evolved over the years with the audiovisual image becoming omnipresent. Yet despite the incursion of the new technologies into many fields of business with the microchip and digital technology changing many aspects of modern life including marketing and distribution systems: the movie and television business remains largely unchanged still the motion picture and television industry today can benefit greatly by reducing overhead costs with the attendant improvement in profit margins. These overhead costs include the

1 replication and distribution of hundreds of celluloid prints, of movies,
2 videotapes, advertising materials and so forth.

3

4 Today, these costs remain substantially of the same character and nature as
5 when the industry was relatively young because the sale of audiovisual
6 materials has undergone little change in decades. Typically, distributors
7 through film markets, catalogue sales and long established relationships
8 between purchasers and sellers, sell films.

9

10 Another problem facing producers and distributors is the high cost of
11 transportation and shipping of the films themselves and marketing and
12 advertising materials associated therewith. Part of this problem includes
13 delayed and damaged shipments adding to the costs involved. Another
14 high-cost component involves responding to requests for previews,
15 marketing materials, contract negotiations, and collecting and tracking
16 sales data for royalties and further marketing programs. Finally, with
17 regard to promotional materials, there is little opportunity to select the
18 same, and wasteful production and transport often occurs.

19

20 Another problem addressed by the present invention is the time involved
21 in marketing and distributing multimedia products, especially motion
22 picture films. The longer the time taken to introduce and distribute a
23 multimedia product the higher the financing costs become since revenues
24 take longer to be returned.

25

1 Yet another problem with the present distribution system is that the
 2 producers and owners must market the products through several different
 3 channels requiring similar expenditures in each of those market areas.
 4 Each purchase usually involves multiple charges for each item sent, such
 5 as trailers, sample materials, duplicates and masters. These costs,
 6 especially when incurred across continents can double a buyer's cost,
 7 thereby significantly cutting into operating margins. In addition, obtaining
 8 prospective purchaser lists, and the purchase history of those purchasers,
 9 in locations around the globe is difficult and thus very costly.

11 Many elements are generated during the production of a typical feature
 12 film. The storage, handling and administration of these elements are time
 13 consuming, labor intensive and thus costly. The delivery process
 14 necessitates working with a variety of suppliers to successfully assemble
 15 the required elements, including thirty five millimeter release prints, audio
 16 and music tracks, foreign language tracks and transcripts, still pictures,
 17 video masters in a variety of formats, such as NTSC, PAL, Beta, one inch,
 18 D1 and D2. Scripts, legal documents and a variety of other documents
 19 must be stored and shipped. Multiple versions of films are often required
 20 to comply with foreign rating regulations. Each time a new purchase is
 21 made for a new market the process must be repeated. The elimination of
 22 physically handling all of these elements significantly reduces labor costs.
 23 Therefore, the present invention is designed to reduce or nearly eliminate
 24 such handling.

1 The market for many films is now worldwide, yet communication between
2 smaller markets around the world remains challenging. Many movies
3 continue to produce revenue long after their first release by being re-
4 released in these smaller markets. In addition, television programming for
5 major markets can continue producing revenue when local television
6 stations around the world seek programming. Nevertheless, servicing the
7 smallest markets remains grossly inefficient. The problems and costs
8 associated with marketing and distributing to these markets are currently
9 not cost effective. The present invention addresses and minimizes these
10 problems by substantially reducing the costs making the marketing and
11 distribution of movies and television programming to these markets
12 economically feasible.

14 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

15 The inventive method of marketing and distributing multimedia such as
16 motion picture films, television programming and the like comprises
17 receiving multimedia material from a producer or owner of the material. If
18 necessary, the material is converted to digital format. The digital material
19 is then stored on a computer readable storage medium. A server system is
20 provided that is accessible over a communication network. The server
21 system accesses data from the computer readable storage medium for
22 transfer over the communication network to exhibitors. The server can
23 provide samples of the multimedia material to potential purchasers
24 depending upon the marketing strategy employed by the producer or
25 owner.

1

2 The inventive system provides for the download, upon request, from the
3 server system over a public or private network of multimedia material and
4 then advertising material to exhibitors purchasing rights over the inventive
5 communications network. This allows exhibitors and broadcasters to
6 locally use the multimedia material.

7

8 The method of marketing and distributing multimedia is dependant upon
9 the format in which the media is embodied. One method of receiving
10 multimedia material is by downloading via the communication network.
11 If the media is not in an electronic format, the producer or owner must
12 convert the media to such a format or physically transport the media to the
13 server for conversion to an electronic format. The preceding arrangement
14 is employed in accordance with the invention for motion picture movies
15 that are commonly produced only in a film format, or in a lower quality on
16 magnetic videotape. The inventive method of marketing and distributing
17 multimedia also includes the capacity to digitize any non-digital media for
18 storage on the computer readable storage medium.

19

20 The inventive system may be employed to deliver films, advertising,
21 coming attraction strips, etc. In conventional form, the inventive method
22 of marketing and distributing multimedia includes the option of providing
23 a server system accessible over a public communication system, such as
24 the Internet. The distribution of the multimedia includes downloading
25 digital material from the server system for digital display to an audience.

1 In addition to the base media, advertising materials can be downloaded
2 from the server system.

3
4 In addition to providing multimedia to users, the server system collects
5 data about the users and information respecting the economics and sales
6 success of exhibitors and broadcasters.

7
8 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

9 These and other features and advantages of the present invention will be
10 readily apparent from the following detailed description of the invention,
11 the scope of the invention being set out in the appended claims. The
12 detailed description will be better understood in conjunction with the
13 accompanying drawings, wherein like reference characters represent like
14 elements throughout the various views of the drawings and wherein:

15
16 Figure 1 is a block diagram generally illustrating the inventive system
17 for marketing and distributing multimedia products;

18 Figure 2 is a block diagram showing a method for loading multimedia
19 of various formats on a computer readable storage medium in
20 accordance with the invention;

21 Figure 3 is an illustration of a computer screen suitable for serving as a
22 home page in accordance with the method and apparatus of
23 the present invention;

24 Figure 4 is a web page screen for the selection of material;

- 1 Figure 5 is a flow chart illustrating the inventive method for obtaining
- 2 product over the Internet;
- 3 Figure 6 is an illustration of a secondary web page for the entry of
- 4 financial data in a web site constructed in accordance with
- 5 present invention;
- 6 Figure 7 is an illustration of a web page for selecting download of
- 7 various products;
- 8 Figure 8 is an illustration of a web page for selecting delivery options
- 9 for multimedia material selected in accordance with the
- 10 present invention;
- 11 Figure 9 is a block diagram showing the structure of input and output
- 12 systems at the central server and at an exhibitor's facility
- 13 utilizing a communications link which may be a publicly
- 14 accessible network such as the Internet; and
- 15 Figure 10 is a flow chart, similar to a flow chart in Figure 5, illustrating
- 16 an alternative inventive method for obtaining product over
- 17 the Internet while generating and providing statistical data.

19 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

20 Referring now to Figure 1, a computer or communications network 10
 21 implementing the method of the present invention is illustrated. In the
 22 illustrated embodiment, the system exchanges information through the use
 23 of cyberspace 12, which may be either a private computer-based
 24 communications system or a public system, such as that known under the
 25 alleged trademark the Internet. In accordance with the invention, an

1 owner of rights in a particular work, such as a multimedia producer 14, is
 2 linked through network 10 to a central server 16 which functions as a
 3 distribution web site in accordance with the invention. Multimedia
 4 producer 14 may also be connected to central server 16 via a private
 5 network link 20, thus providing either a faster data link, a more secure
 6 link, or both. In addition, in accordance with the invention, it is
 7 contemplated that communications between the owners of rights may also
 8 take traditional forms, such as the transfer of print masters, or the like.

9
 10 Similarly, a plurality of exhibitors, including a movie theater 18a, a
 11 television station 18b, a satellite television operator 18c, a cable television
 12 operator 18d and a high school 18e, are also connected through cyberspace
 13 12 to central server 16. It is noted that in accordance with the invention,
 14 the servicing of smaller facilities, such as high school 18e is particularly
 15 cost-effective as compared to conventional methods for transporting film
 16 and associated promotional materials.

17
 18 Multimedia producer 14, central server 16, and each of the exhibitors 18a-e
 19 obtain and/or send product and associated information through facilities
 20 which comprise computers with various peripheral devices, such as a
 21 communications modem, display screen, keyboard, various printers,
 22 scanners, and the like, as will be discussed in greater detail below. In the
 23 case of central server 16, relatively robust commercial systems may be
 24 employed. However, sufficient functionality can be achieved by exhibitors

1 18a-e using high-end personal computers with enhanced RAM and hard
2 drives.

3
4 Referring now to Figure 2, a flow chart is presented that generally shows
5 how various multimedia formats can be loaded into a computer readable
6 storage media 28 by producers and other persons who own rights in
7 various cinematographic properties. In accordance with the invention the
8 same are loaded into a computer readable storage media 28, which is
9 located at central server 16. Media 28 may take any one of a number of
10 different forms, but in accordance with the preferred embodiment
11 comprises a hard drive with high-speed access and large capacity.

12 Alternatively, the same may be a combination of a large hard drive for
13 materials other than feature-length or program-length movies, while such
14 movies and programs are made available via a jukebox arrangement
15 involving access to multiple disks and mechanical systems for moving
16 those disks to one or a plurality of player heads.

17
18 In accordance with present invention, there are a plurality of input paths
19 over which films and associated materials can be transported for storage in
20 media 28. In the simplest case, all such media material is physically
21 delivered to central server 16. An operator at central server 16 logs onto a
22 central processor unit located at the premises of the website operator at
23 step 30 in Figure 2. After logging on, the operator of the system inputs an
24 identifier, such as a title of a movie, associated with the material to be
25 entered, converted, and stored on storage media 28. Such material

associated with the title may include the actual film, in the case of a feature length film, graphics for a newspaper advertisement, a radio spot, a poster, a coming attractions film segment, handbills or the like.

In accordance with the invention, it is also contemplated that producers may log onto the website from a remote location. Likewise, the official operator of the website can also log onto the system from a remote location.

Input of Materials into the System.

If we first consider the case of a remote official operator logging onto the system at step 30, such operator gives his name and password, thus identifying himself. The system thus knows the identity of the person using the system from the name and password of the individual logging onto the system, in this case the official operator. The official operator is treated as the equivalent of an owner because he acts for owners to input materials into the system. When the operator is identified, at step 31 the system makes the determination that the operator is acting for owners of product. At this point the system presents the operator with a list of titles at step 32 and gives the operator access to implement the system whose operation is illustrated in Figure 2.

If, on the other hand the system determines that the person logging onto the system is an exhibitor, it proceeds along path 29 through the inventive

1 method steps toward implementation of distribution of product over the
2 Internet to the exhibitor, the charging of the account of the exhibitor, and
3 to various other steps, as will be described in detail below.

4

5 One embodiment of the invention will now be described in connection
6 with the input of a movie entitled "ABC". Initially, this movie is received
7 on seventy-millimeter film (celluloid). The producer or owner of the
8 movie also provides the operator of the inventive web site with advertising
9 posters, newspaper advertisements, radio promotional spots on
10 audiocassette or compact disc, television promotional spots on video
11 cassette or videodisc, trailers on celluloid or video cassette, a film strip
12 comprising a coming events announcement, and text, such as all or
13 portions of the script and critic's reviews. All of these materials and other
14 types of materials that are normally transported physically from the
15 owner, such as the producer or other owner of rights, to the person
16 licensing the movie, are digitized and stored in storage media 28 in
17 accordance with the invention.

18

19 When these materials are in-house, the operator, who is to enter the
20 material into the information storage media 28 for availability over the
21 Internet from central server 16, enters the title, ABC, at step 32. In
22 accordance with the invention, a screen for the entry of the title is
23 provided. The screen has a line into which the title is to be entered which
24 may be highlighted, whereby the title of the movie may be typed in. The
25 system, in this respect behaves like other systems where the beginning of

1 the typing of the name results in the system following the keystrokes to
2 come to the title, if that title is in storage. In this respect, the system
3 operates much like help topics in many programs. Likewise, it is possible
4 to cursor through the list of titles, again as in the case of the help topics
5 screen. If no material associated with the title is in storage, the title will
6 not be found. It then becomes necessary that, in accordance with the
7 invention, the title must be entered into the system at step 33.

8
9 In this respect, the central processor 22 at step 34 checks computer readable
10 storage media 28 to see if the title has previously been entered into the
11 system. If the title is already in the system, the operator will be given the
12 opportunity to enter or select various versions of the media and select
13 materials, such as a television version, director's cut, poster, European
14 version and the like, as appears more fully below.

15
16 If it is a new title, the system, at step 36, assigns an identifier to the title
17 ABC and, at step 38, stores that information in storage media 28. The
18 operator can then input any additional data at step 40, such as the
19 producer or owner of the title. The object of this additional entry of data is
20 to allow the identification of products in ways other than the title.

21
22 This allows additional flexibility when it comes time to output product
23 from the system. For example, if one wanted to search the work of Stanley
24 Kubrick, or dramatizations of Mario Puzo novels, such additional
25 information provides for this facility. In addition, more than one piece

1 may have the same title. Accordingly, such additional information allows
2 positive identification of the particular item to be furnished to an exhibitor
3 or broadcaster. In accordance with the invention it is contemplated that
4 after a title has been entered into the system and given an identifier, the
5 title may be retrieved at step 33 from storage media 28 and presented to
6 the operator at step 40, where additional materials can be added if desired.
7

8 Returning to description of the inventive method for inputting materials
9 into the system, the operator indicates the type of media at step 42 that is
10 to be converted into digital format, if necessary, and stored on storage
11 media 28. For example, the material may be identified as a feature film on
12 celluloid, an hour-long television program on video, a radio spot for a
13 movie, the magazine advertisement for a television show, or the like. Once
14 rendered and stored digitally on central server 16, audio and visual
15 materials are easily accessible by business-to-business customers around
16 the globe.
17

18 The invention may be applied, for example, to the various types of media
19 illustrated in Figure 2, namely celluloid, video, audio, text, and graphics.

20 At step 46, visual media, such as film or videotape is input into the system
21 for conversion. Movie film can come in several formats of its own, such as
22 seventy millimeter, thirty-five millimeter, and sixteen millimeter, each of
23 which can be in such formats as interpositive, duplicate negative, original
24 negative, low contrast print, or release print.
25

1 In the case of such film inputs into the system, it is necessary for the film to
2 be scanned at step 48 and turned into an analog RGB video signal. The
3 video signal resulting from the scanning of the celluloid film can then be
4 digitized using an analog to digital converter and stored in RAM at step
5 50. Because of the high bandwidth of the resulting video signals and the
6 very large information content associated with a video signal, it has
7 relatively large storage requirements. However, video signals are also
8 highly redundant. Accordingly, compression of video signals is highly
9 effective and desirable. Accordingly, after the signal has been digitized in
10 RAM at step 50, the signal is compressed at step 52, given an address at
11 step 54 and stored in media 28. At step 54, the type of the particular
12 product, which has been stored, will be indicated in storage, in this case,
13 film, and details respecting the nature of that film will also be indicated in
14 storage. For example, the product may be designated as seventy
15 millimeter, feature length, documentary footage shot for television in 1984.
16 Other details respecting the particular product, such as the producer,
17 director, actors cover and other information may also be sent to storage for
18 later retrieval.

19
20 In accordance with the present invention, in order to avoid a need for
21 excessive storage space in media 28, the video signal, whether it was
22 generated by scanning conventional celluloid film or originated as a video
23 signal on videotape, is not put into RAM for compression in one large
24 operation, but is, instead, digitally compressed portion by portion to
25 reduce bandwidth and file size, and then stored at step 54. However, after

1 one video portion has been stored in media 28 at step 54, the system
2 returns to step 46, where additional video is input into the system and
3 processed as described above, and the entire process repeated until the
4 entire video has been transformed into RAM. It is noted that the
5 redundancy in a video signal resides largely in corresponding pixel to
6 corresponding pixel redundancy from one frame to the next. Accordingly,
7 it is highly desirable that portions to be compressed be more than one
8 frame in size, and that each frame of each such portion is compared to the
9 prior frame, corresponding pixel by corresponding pixel. This will
10 effectively remove redundancy and maximize the reduction of file size.

11
12 In accordance with the invention, it is also contemplated that electronic
13 video recordings may also be input into the system, digitized and stored in
14 media 28. For example, possible video formats include VHS, 12, digital
15 Betacam, D1, D2, BetacamSP, and the new high-resolution formats. When
16 a video signal is to be digitized, scanning is not necessary and after input
17 of the footage at step 56, the system proceeds directly to digitize the signal
18 and store it in RAM at step 58. The digitized movie is then compressed at
19 step 60, and stored in RAM together with its associated other information,
20 as described above the connection with film input at step 46, under its
21 identifier address at step 62 in computer readable storage 28. Here again,
22 because of the high information content of video, digitizing and
23 compression is done in portions at steps 58 and 60, the information is
24 stored at step 62, and the system proceeds back to step 56 to repeat the
25 process for the next portion of input video.

1 As alluded to above, the objective of the system is to store not only feature
2 films, but also associated promotional and other materials. For example,
3 marketing materials may be stored along with a feature film. This allows
4 such materials to be sent in digital form directly from producer 14 to
5 central server 16 via either cyberspace 12 or private link 20, as shown in
6 Figure 1. With the advent of motion pictures being "filmed" digitally, this
7 transfer will be relatively easy. However, since almost all existing feature
8 films are on celluloid, they must be converted by scanning and digitizing,
9 and then compressed and stored, or converted and compressed through
10 the use of equivalent techniques.

11
12 Referring back to the objective of storing associated materials, if, for
13 example, a radio spot is to be input into the system, the system proceeds to
14 step 64, where audio material can be entered. This is done by the system
15 activating a soundcard or similar device in the computer associated with
16 the storage of information on disk storage 28. In accordance with the
17 invention, analog audio may simply be coupled to the soundcard. The
18 same can be generated using any playback device, or, alternatively, or may
19 arrive from a remote location by wire, for example, over the telephone
20 system. Audio may input into the system by a producer 14 in any format
21 such as DA-88, DAT, thirty-five millimeter magnetic tape, sixteen
22 millimeter magnetic tape, 1/4² audio tape, thirty-five millimeter optical
23 tack, computer session, compact disc, audio from video formats noted
24 above, or any other source, including live performance. If audio is input at
25 step 64 in an analog format, it is converted to digital at analog/digital

1 conversion step 58. Digital audio may then optionally be compressed in
2 memory at step 68. The audio spot is then stored at step seventy under a
3 selected identifier which associates it was the particular feature film or
4 other product for later retrieval from readable storage 28 via the Internet,
5 private link, or the like.

6 It is also contemplated that the inventive system will be used to make
7 graphics, such as movie posters, handbills, newspaper advertisements, and
8 the like inexpensively and quickly available at remote locations. In the
9 event that the operator wishes to input such materials into the system, the
10 system proceeds to step 72 in response to the selection of the media type at
11 step 42. The operator activates the input graphics at step 72, after the
12 system activates a scanner at step 74.

13
14 In accordance with the invention, it is contemplated that the input of
15 graphics at step 72 and scanning at step 74 will consist generally letter size
16 or smaller graphics and text (typical of magazines and smaller newspaper
17 advertising, handbills and the like). Over the system also contemplates
18 application to oversize graphics with and without text (such as posters of
19 the type commonly seen at movie theaters). After the performance of
20 scanning at step 74, the output of the scanner is digitized at step 76. The
21 file containing the graphics entered into the system is then compressed at
22 step 78, although this is optional. The final version of the material is then
23 stored in memory at step 80. Such storage at step 80 in disk storage 28 is
24 done under the selected identifier that associates it with the particular

1 feature film or to like. Such storage also includes the description of the
2 media type (graphics) so that the same is available from storage media 28.

3
4 There has been described above a process for moving graphics of a
5 conventional nature into the system. This is particularly important in the
6 case of the overwhelming majority of existing feature films and other
7 productions. However, this will become increasingly unimportant in the
8 future as virtually all production of such materials migrates into the digital
9 world.

10
11 Accordingly, as multimedia producer 14 in digital form may produce some
12 or all of the media materials in this category, this material may also be
13 transferred electronically over cyberspace 12 or private network 20 to
14 central server 16. Downloads to central server 16 may be done directly
15 into storage media 28 under a selected identifier. Alternatively, more
16 control may be exercised by the operator of the web site at central server 16
17 by having the download stored temporarily in a "mail box" file assigned to
18 the producer for such purposes, or the like, until an operator located at the
19 central server reviews material and transfers it to its proper place in
20 storage media 28 under its associated feature film or the like identifier and
21 type.

22
23 In similar fashion, and it is possible, in accordance with the present
24 invention, to input alphanumeric materials into the system for retrieval
25 over the Internet. Such alphanumeric materials may include scripts,

1 foreign subtitles, and closed caption data for the hearing-impaired. Where
 2 such alphanumeric data has been selected for input at step 42, the system
 3 proceeds to look up the film's identification address, which is then
 4 associated with the material at step 44 . The system then receives such
 5 alphanumeric data at step 82, and stores that material at step 84.

6

7 Inasmuch as such alphanumeric material is generally available in digital
 8 form, it is contemplated that the same will be downloaded to disk storage
 9 28 through the use of the Internet or conventional magnetic disk storage,
 10 such as floppy disks, or the like. However, in the event that such
 11 information is only available in hardcopy, the same may be scanned using
 12 optical character recognition software, with an OCR reader and the optical
 13 character recognition software being activated at step 42 upon the
 14 identification of the type of material.

15

16 In accordance with the invention, it is also contemplated that other
 17 materials not specifically identified above, may also be input into the
 18 system for later retrieval from disk storage 28 via the Internet or other
 19 means. It is also noted that, in accordance with the invention, it is
 20 preferred that material be input into the system through the use of existing
 21 digital materials, through the use of remote transport over the Internet or
 22 other communications network.

23

24 In accordance with the method of the present invention, the presentation
 25 of the program illustrated by the flowchart of Figure 2 is done on the

1 monitor of a computer in conjunction with the number of screens which
 2 form the graphical user interface between the inventive system and the
 3 person implementing the storage of film and materials in disk storage 28.
 4 More particularly, Figure 3 is an example of a display screen for
 5 implementation of steps 30 and 32 in Figure 2.

6 7 Graphical User Interface.

8
 9 Referring now to Figure 3, a screen 100 is shown that is a simplified web
 10 site home page to be viewed by a producer or an exhibitor looking to
 11 transact business or communicate with the operator of the inventive web
 12 site. A log-on block 102 for implementation of step 30 is provided. A
 13 person working on behalf of any owner of rights which participates in the
 14 system (such as a producer 14 as illustrated Figure 1) or any one of the
 15 exhibitors 18a-e can enter his organization's name and password in order
 16 to gain access to the rest of the web site. If a valid password is entered the
 17 user can then make a selection or enter a desired title. Once logged on, a
 18 user can enter a title or click on search button 104 to locate a particular type
 19 of movie.

20
 21 Searching is done by way of a secondary group of screens allowing
 22 searching according to any of various search criteria, such as producer,
 23 director, lead actor, supporting actors, subject matter, etc. Once the
 24 searching has been completed, the title of the product, which the user is
 25 interested in obtaining, appears after "Movie Title:" in screen 100.

1 Screen 100 has two sets of functions associated with it. The first set of
2 functions is implemented when the system recognizes that it is dealing
3 with a producer or other order of rights. On the other hand, a second set
4 of functions is active and implemented when the system recognizes that it
5 is dealing with an exhibitor.

6
7 In the case where the system recognizes the person logging onto the web
8 site as an owner of rights, it implements the first set of functions.

9 Accordingly, if the user is a producer or other owner of rights and wishes
10 to view the conditions for use of the web site to distribute his product for
11 various types of products, he clicks on an enter sales data button 106.

12 Upon the clicking of button 106, if the user is unknown to the system, the
13 user is instructed in subsequent screens to enter such data as the type of
14 product which he licenses, the performers associated with the product, the
15 content (i.e. dramatic, musical, news, etc.), and historical income data. If
16 the user is already known to the system, much information is already
17 known to the system, such as the location of the exhibitor, the nature of his
18 business, his existing contractual relationships with exhibitors and with
19 the operator of the web site, and the like. This allows the system to give
20 the exhibitor cost factors in accordance with his contracts and other
21 information. Naturally, these figures are a function of agreements between
22 the web site operator and the owner of rights.

23
24 In addition to using the home page 100 as an entry point to subsequent
25 screens for providing information, and providing for the input of product

1 into the system, the home page also provides a portal for a client, such as
2 an exhibitor or an owner of rights, to view his account status, as will be
3 described more fully below.

4
5 In addition, an exhibitor, for example, may click on an email button 110 to
6 be added to an email list to receive announcements for such things as
7 newly added titles on a regular basis. In the case of owners of rights, other
8 subject matter will be implemented in regular e-mail communication. In
9 addition, a "send e-mail" button 112 may be provided on home page 100 to
10 allow messages to be sent to the web site operator.

11
12 A button 114 for requesting additional information about the web site may
13 also be placed on the home page illustrated in Figure 3. This information
14 may be on the home page to give unregistered visitors an idea of what the
15 web site is all about. Clicking on button 114 will bring the users to a
16 secondary page or pages giving information on the web site (not
17 illustrated).

18
19 It is also contemplated that various advertisements 116 may also appear on
20 the home page. In accordance of the invention it is contemplated that such
21 advertisements will be specific to particular users, their geography and the
22 like and will be based on information held in the system with respect to
23 prior exhibition of various titles, their popularity and the like. The
24 objective of the system is to use data inside the database of the web site to
25 predict successful products and to make such products available to users

by way of advertisements, and to further include in said advertisements information with respect to the fact that such product is expected to be successful and why such success is to be expected. Such information may include information on previous box office, Nielsen ratings, or the like in other cities.

Such information may also include the fact that the product is generally popular, but has not been seen in the area for years. This is of particular interest to television operators who are sometimes not well staffed and thus not able to do the research, which would make their stations successful. As is alluded to above, it is the objective of this invention to store in its database all information respecting licensing of films and other products, their location, the time at which licensing of the same occurred, box office, and so forth for later use in targeted advertising and in checking the accuracy of reported box office (in order to prevent fraud), and for other uses known to those in the industry.

Returning to the description of the function of screen 100 as a portal for exhibitors or the official web site operator to enter products into storage media 28, once the title is entered data entry logon block 102 and button 118 is click on, the system proceeds to screen 120 in Figure 4. Screen 120 provides for the input of three types of material, namely, text and graphics, they feature film, and audio. The user would then click the button associated with the particular type of material in the general categories noted above, which he wishes to input. Each selection may have sub-

1 screens for making additional distinctions between the formats set forth
2 above.

3

4 Alternatively, screen 120 could be replaced by a screen, which lists such
5 things as feature films, television specials, news programs, and so forth.

6 Selection of one of these types of material to be downloaded to the web site
7 results in the generation of inappropriate sub screen. For example, if

8 feature film is selected, the sub screen would list feature film, radio

9 promotion spot, magazine advertisements, posters and the like. Some

10 screens coming off of each of these selections would differentiate between

11 the various types of formats. For example, feature film would bring up a

12 screen showing celluloid format, video format, and digital format.

13

14 Either of these two alternatives provides for the generation of descriptive

15 and indexing information in the process of downloading product into the

16 web site.

17 In the event that the decision has been made to make certain functions of

18 central server 16 directly available to producers 14 over a computer

19 network 10, screen 44 becomes a generally available web page and

20 functions for numerous producers 16 as it does for an operator at central

21 server 16 to enter new multimedia material, such as a new version for a

22 movie, or simply to update a critics comments on a poster or press release.

23 Even different departments with an individual producer 16 may have

24 access to such a web site of central server 16.

25

1 Remote Access to Product and Transfer of Same over the Internet.

2

3 If the user is an exhibitor and wishes to view the conditions for sale of the
4 particular product selected, the exhibitor clicks on an enter sales data
5 button 106 in Figure 3. Upon the clicking of button 106, the user is
6 instructed in subsequent screens to enter such data as his expected box
7 office figures. Other information is already known to the system, such as
8 the location of the exhibitor, the nature of his business, his existing
9 contractual relationships with producers or owners and with the operator
10 of the web site, and the like. This allows the system to give the exhibitor
11 cost factors in accordance with his contracts and other information.
12 Naturally, these figures are a function of agreements between the web site
13 operator and the owner of rights in the particular title sought by the user.

14

15 In addition to using the home page 100 as an entry point to subsequent
16 screens for searching and purchasing rights in product and arranging for
17 the transport of the same via the Internet or otherwise, including
18 conventional means, the home page also provides a portal for an exhibitor
19 as well as an owner of rights, to view his account status.

20

21 If the exhibitor wishes to obtain media, the exhibitor clicks on button 118,
22 and this brings up screen 120 illustrated in Figure 4. As illustrated in
23 Figure 4, the select media type screen 120 presents the operator with
24 several choices with respect to media type and format. The exhibitor is
25 thus invited to click on various buttons to obtain various products. It is

1 noted that this screen is greatly simplified or purposes of illustration and
2 may include any products that the operator of the web site wishes to make
3 available, such as posters, radio advertisements, and so forth, and that
4 screen 120 may have specific entries of it which show the availability of
5 such products, their length, their size, and so forth.

6
7 Once a title and its associated marketing material has been stored on
8 computer readable storage media 28 of central server 16 as described
9 above, it can be accessed by an exhibitor 18a-18d from anywhere in the
10 world through a connection to cyberspace 12, in this example, the Internet.
11 The steps of inventive method 122 for implementing the transport of
12 product already in storage at the central server are illustrated in Figure 5.

13
14 In particular, an exhibitor 18, after reaching the central server's web site,
15 can log on at step 30 by entering a name known to the system and
16 confirming the same with a password. This is done on the site's home
17 page as illustrated Figure 3. Alternatively, the exhibitor may click on a
18 become a member button 124 and be sent to a data entry step 98. Such a
19 data entry step is associated with a screen with basic information about
20 interests and the nature of the user. Later, the system sends the visitor to a
21 financial data entry screen 126, as illustrated Figure 6, and as will be more
22 fully described below. In accordance with the invention, it is anticipated
23 that the ability of small facilities, such as high schools, colleges and the like
24 to obtain first quality product will be enhanced. This is because of the cost
25 savings associated with the automated transfer of product over the

Internet. Accordingly, such users will be paying relatively small amounts of money and a credit card financing arrangement may become the rule rather than the exception. Such an arrangement is easily implemented using screen 126.

However, in the case of "trade" users, more sophisticated arrangements may become necessary with correspondingly different input screens. Such arrangements may involve automatic debiting of bank accounts, 30 days credit, or other arrangements typically used in the entertainment industry.

It is also contemplated that charges may be key to Nielsen ratings in the case of television exhibitors, and that the output of the Nielsen ratings system may be input into the system for automatic charging of the accounts of television exhibitors after a particular product has been transported to the exhibitor and exhibited on television, provided that the Nielsen system has monitored the subject exhibition.

Referring back to Figure 5, central server 16 examines the log on entry at step 31 to determine whether the individual is an exhibitor who is going to transport material to the database, or an exhibitor who will have product downloaded to his site for exhibition, posting, advertising for the like. If the system determines that the individual is an owner or other person wishing to download information into the web site at step 31, it will proceed along path 128 and through the method steps illustrated in Figure 2.

1 If, on the other hand, the system detects at step 31 that the person who has
2 logged on is an exhibitor 18, it implements the method steps illustrated
3 Figure 5. In particular, it moves along path 29 to step 130, where it
4 determines whether the user is already signed as a subscriber to the
5 product transport service provided by the operator of the inventive web
6 site. In the event that the individual is not a subscriber, certain limited
7 functions will be allowed to function. The purpose of this is to interest the
8 individual visiting the web site into becoming a member of the service.
9

10 Referring back to Figure 5, if the user does not have a valid password, or is
11 a new user, the user can enter and sign-up by giving certain data at step
12 132. After the data entry screen has been populated with all necessary data
13 by the person visiting the web site, the system proceeds to step 134 where
14 a financial data information screen 126, as illustrated Figure 6, is presented
15 to enable the visitor to enter either credit card and/or financial institution
16 information.
17

18 It is contemplated that many different types of transactions will be
19 available. For example, a user does not purchase a major motion picture
20 with a credit card, since payment is usually based on revenues, such as a
21 royalty payment, often keyed to box office receipts. However, a credit card
22 makes sense for the purchase of a poster, radio spot, or the like. Older
23 films and "B" movies may be available to some users, such as schools,
24 libraries, and other non-profit organizations, and these may be purchased
25 by use of a credit card. Indeed, even feature films being distributed to a

1 relatively small venue for a single showing, such as a high school, they use
 2 the services of a credit card company. It is also noted that if the credit card
 3 is being used in connection with an exhibition at a small venue and the
 4 product is being offered on the basis of the box office as opposed to a fixed
 5 fee, an estimate of the charge associated with the transaction may be made
 6 in charge to the credit card account, with any excess being credited or
 7 shortfall charged after exhibition.

8
 9 Alternatively, users may make deposits and obtain credits, which may be
 10 charged against, in the case of greater charges. It is also contemplated in
 11 accordance with the present invention that direct charges against the bank
 12 account of an exhibitor may be made, and that the same may be
 13 implemented electronically at the time that the order for, for example, a
 14 feature films is placed. Once the order has been placed and the account
 15 debited instantly and electronically, product may be delivered to the
 16 exhibitor. In the case of exhibition by license keyed to the box office,
 17 historical data in the system may be used to estimate the box office and the
 18 royalty.

19
 20 After user 18 completes the entry of financial data at step 134, the system
 21 proceeds to a credit approval step 136. In the case of a credit card, this is
 22 simply the verification that the account has the amount of money needed
 23 to consummate the transaction. In the case of more substantial accounts,
 24 such as a theater in a major city, the system may log itself off after

1 receiving data necessary for credit check, and the credit check
2 implemented in a conventional way.

3
4 After the credit check has resulted in a determination, the system sends the
5 user an e-mail telling him to contact the web site. The user then logs onto
6 the web site and continues the process. If the credit of the user has been
7 disapproved, he is told us at step 136 and the system proceeds to log off at
8 step 138.

9
10 After the credit of the user, now a prospective exhibitor has been approved
11 at step 136, the system proceeds to the select action step 140. Likewise, in
12 the system had determined at step 130 that the individual was already an
13 exhibitor known to the system after checking the name and password, the
14 system also proceeds to the select action step 140.

15
16 At the select action step, a select action menu is presented to the exhibitor
17 in the form of a select action screen 142 which gives the exhibitor the
18 opportunity to take various actions with respect to the title previously
19 selected, as illustrated Figure 7. An example of such a secondary web page
20 142 shows the various choices that a verified user may make. By way of
21 example, and not by way of limitation, a user may click on a change
22 language button 144 to view the web site in a different language. A user
23 may click on a preview movie button 146 to preview a selected movie title
24 or click on a preview other programming button 148 to view television
25 programming or the like. A user may click on a download movie or

1 program button 150 to download a selected title or program. A download
 2 advertising button 152 may be provided that either downloads an
 3 advertising package containing preselected material or allows the user to
 4 select from a list of available material. Since there may be advertising
 5 supplements available a download advertising supplements button 154
 6 may be present. Other marketing materials that may be made available for
 7 the title selected in the previous screen, and having their own buttons in
 8 screen 142, may include previews and trailers button 156, audio segments
 9 button 158, ownership verification button 160, contract information button
 10 162, a terms button 164, and a sales history and related information
 11 button 166, all for the previously selected feature film, program or other
 12 product.

13
 14 After the selection is made at step 140, that selection is recorded at step 168
 15 along with an identification designation associated with the exhibitor who
 16 has made that selection. This enables a record to be kept of each user's
 17 requests, along with selected data such as date and time of request. It also
 18 enables the collection of some of the statistical data to be used by the
 19 system.

20
 21 If at the select action step a selection was made which indicates that the
 22 user is interested in exhibiting a particular product, such as buttons 146,
 23 150, 152, or 166, the system proceeds to step 170. A title availability
 24 function is performed at step 170 to determine whether the particular title
 25 is available. If the title is not available, the screen receives and presents an

1 indication that the title is not available and provides a button for the user
2 to make another selection. If the title is not available, the exhibitor is
3 returned to select action step 140 to select another action, or change the
4 title, either manually or through activation of the search button in screen
5 142 illustrated in Figure 7.

6

7 Once a title that is in the system has been selected its identifier is noted in
8 memory and the exhibitor is able then to make appropriate selections.

9 Several functions may be available on a single screen as described above.

10 A user may call up a review movie function at step 172. At step 172 the
11 exhibitor is given the opportunity to either review an entire movie or
12 portions thereof. After that, the exhibitor has the opportunity to decide
13 whether to select another title and be sent to select action step 140 or
14 decide to proceed with purchasing or leasing the movie.

15

16 Where the exhibitor has decided to purchase the product after being
17 presented with an alphanumeric invitation to do so, screen at the web site,
18 the exhibitor is then presented with a contract for the particular material
19 for the selected title and accepts or refuses the contract at contract
20 acceptance function 174. User 18 then selects type of material that is
21 desired at the select format step 176. For example, if a poster is desired,
22 the resolution must be selected to fit the size that the poster will be, for
23 example, handbill-size, or marquee-size. This selection is also recorded at
24 step 168 for later analysis. The selected material is then downloaded at
25 step 180 and the download is stored on the user's local storage media at

1 step 182. Step 180 is implemented in a separate screen illustrated in Figure
2 8, which will be described in detail below. The exhibitor's account or
3 credit card is charged at 184. The user is then permitted to either select
4 another title or leave the web site at step 128.

5
6 As alluded to above, Figure 8 illustrates a web site page for enabling an
7 exhibitor to select delivery options including download (via Internet)
8 indicated by a selector box 186, overnight delivery indicated by a selector
9 box 188, regular surface indicated by a selector box 190, fax indicated by a
10 selector box 192 (if appropriate media requested), and a telephone
11 confirmation of request option indicated by a selector box 194. The
12 exhibitor clicks on any one of the above selector boxes 186 through 192,
13 and, if desired, telephone confirmation selector box 194 executing their
14 marked request(s) by clicking on send request button 180. After the
15 appropriate boxes have been selected by the exhibitor, the exhibitor then
16 clicks on button 196 to send this information to the system.

17 Referring now to Figure 9, the relationship between central server 16 and
18 exhibitor 18 is shown in greater detail in block diagram form along with
19 certain functions occurring at each location. As previously discussed,
20 media having different formats is loaded or stored onto computer readable
21 data storage media 28 using peripherals connected to central server 16.

22 Examples of peripheral equipment include film scanner 198, which scans
23 visual material in the form of celluloid film to be digitized and turns it into
24 a digital signal, which is compressed, and stored on data storage media 28.

25 Sound board 200 is utilized in conjunction with devices capable of playing

1 audio material in various formats as discussed above to digitize the
 2 material for later compression and storage on data storage media 28.
 3 Scanner 202 is a letter size scanner for digitizing text, small graphical
 4 material and the like of marketing materials, such as newspaper and radio
 5 advertisements to be used by a local theater or television station owner. A
 6 large format scanner 204 is used to digitize media such as the posters that
 7 are common in theaters for hyping patrons with respect to coming
 8 attractions.

9
 10 The computer readable data storage media 28 is made available to
 11 exhibitors 18 using their own central processor units 206 and its associated
 12 memory, communicating with the central server 16 over a communication
 13 network such as the Internet. In the case of using the Internet for a
 14 connection, user's computer 206 acts through the web site computer, which
 15 serves as the central server 16, to access data storage media 28. Once
 16 digitized media materials may be downloaded to user's computer 206
 17 using an appropriate data storage media depending upon the size of the
 18 media to be downloaded. In particular, any selected material can be
 19 printed out on a poster size printer doorway, printed on a letter size
 20 printer 210, recorded on an audio connection or system 212, or a digital
 21 projector 214 in the case of a theater. However, in the case of a television
 22 transmitter associated with a television station, the material may be
 23 downloaded to videotape or any other format for playback by the
 24 television station.

25

1 A particularly advantageous embodiment of the system especially adapted
 2 to sales of audiovisual productions to television stations and theaters is
 3 illustrated in Figure 10. In accordance with the embodiment of the system
 4 illustrated in Figure 10, data is collected for the purpose of billing and also
 5 for the purpose of generating a database of information useful as a sales
 6 tool and as a device for assuring a high likelihood of exhibitor satisfaction
 7 with the delivered product.

8 In the system illustrated in Figure 10, operation of system 422 is similar to
 9 the operation of the system illustrated in Figure 5, and parts performing
 10 the same function have been given the same reference numerals. The
 11 description that follows is limited to those aspects of the system, which are
 12 different from the embodiment of Figure 5.

13
 14 In particular, in system 422 after a movie has been viewed at step 172
 15 contract terms for commercial licensing of a production are presented at
 16 step 424. This is followed at step 426 with the presentation of statistics
 17 respecting the particular system at step 428. Such statistics may include
 18 past box office in cities of various sizes, with various language use
 19 characteristics, and so forth, such data being collected by the system
 20 during the course of a customer's signing up for the inventive service, and
 21 the customers using the inventive service.

22
 23 After acceptance and format selection at steps 174 and 176, the system
 24 proceeds to log a follow-up at step 430 by sending information respecting
 25 the format selected to the database 432. This information is sent at step

1 434. At step 174, the system also proceeds to send information respecting
 2 the contract acceptance to database 432 at step 436. This includes the
 3 storage of statistics on such things as format, customer, customer location,
 4 other products combined with the subject product in the same order, title,
 5 nature of exhibitor, and so forth. This information is sent to a statistics
 6 database 438 at step 436. The system then proceeds to download the
 7 selected material at step 180, as illustrated in Figure 5, and the material
 8 stored and the account of the client charged, or the transaction financially
 9 implemented by other means.

10
 11 Follow-up database 432 is periodically queried for ripe follow-up data.
 12 Ripeness may be determined by any suitable means, including fixed
 13 periods, inquiries from the customer, detection of a problem, or the like. In
 14 response to a determination that a particular sale, previously made as
 15 described above, is right for inquiry, this information comes from database
 16 432 and, in the case of a theater triggers the sending of an e-mail at step 440
 17 or other communication to the theater requiring respecting the box office
 18 receipts. When this information is received, the system proceeds at step
 19 442 to record the box office receipts and so this information to statistics
 20 database 438. In addition, the system also triggers the charging of the
 21 customers account in a second implementation of step 184.

22
 23 In similar fashion, in the case of a customer that is a television station, the
 24 most applicable ratings at the time of the airing of the product are checked
 25 by the system at step 442. The statistics are then stored at step 436 and sent

1 to statistics database 438. Such information can be made available on
 2 demand (for example by clicking on an appropriately labeled screen
 3 button) to any person using the automated ordering system as outlined
 4 above of the present invention, or it may be "pushed" without a customer
 5 demand (for example as a marketing tool to advertise or promote a
 6 particularly attractive product, or get a sale on a product about which the
 7 customer has already inquired about) at any point or points in the ordering
 8 cycle for multimedia product.

9
 10 While the foregoing description and drawings represents the preferred
 11 embodiments of the present invention, it will be understood that various
 12 additions, modifications and substitutions may be made without departing
 13 from the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined in the
 14 accompanying claims. In particular, it will be clear that the present
 15 invention may be embodied in other specific forms, structures,
 16 arrangements, proportions, and with other elements, materials, and
 17 components, without departing from the spirit or essential characteristics
 18 thereof.

19
 20 The presently disclosed embodiments are therefore to be considered in all
 21 respects as illustrative and not restrictive. The metes and bounds of the
 22 invention are defined by the appended claims, and not limited to the
 23 foregoing description.